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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a developmental arts activities program for preschool children centered on traditional Greek arts. The program's elements include discussion and observation of traditional arts, collection and categorization of textile materials, manipulation of the materials, production and work with the materials to construct various designs and objects, and evaluation by the children. The paper describes specific steps of the program, which include: (1) visits to an ethnological museum, crafts workshops, and fabric or carpet factories; (2) a folk-art corner in the classroom; (3) painting and drawing of traditional folk designs; (4) painting with string; (5) string collage and construction; (6) fabric collage and construction; and (7) weaving. Contains 19 references. (EV)

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**FOLK ARTS-TRADITIONAL ARTS
OF GREECE:
Art Activities with fibers,
fabrics and weaving for
young children**

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FOLK ARTS-TRADITIONAL ARTS OF GREECE: ART ACTIVITIES WITH FIBERS, FABRICS AND WEAVING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Usually in the Spring, around the 25th of March, the day of celebration of Greek Independence, the attention of young children in the Greek Kindergartens is focused on the events of 1821. Along with songs, stories and perhaps dramatical plays, etc., there are also art activities with themes for the holiday. All too often, unfortunately, the only art activity given to the children is to color, cut and glue a paper design of a «τσαπούχη» made from a adult drawn outline (the leather shoe with tassel of traditional Greek costume).

Given the fact that the children have a chance to see pictures about the heroes and heroines of 1821, they are thus exposed to the traditional costumes and designs of that period. To extend the children's awareness of their cultural heritage and to give them more opportunity to observe Greek traditional arts program of art activities was proposed and has been implemented over a 10 year period (1990-2000)

The aims and objectives show the general reasons for introducing a program of traditional arts to preschool children:

- To encourage the young children's appreciation of their cultural heritage and folk art traditions.

- To allow the young children the necessary opportunities and experiences to work with fiber and fabric materials and to see the development from natural sources of the materials until art constructions.
- To understand textures, decorations and color harmonies as seen in different types of weaving.
- To encourage young children to work with geometric designs, with rhythm and repetitive patterns.
- To cultivate self-assurance and independence through the children's own creations and to allow the children express themselves creatively and sensitively.

A DEVELOPMENTAL ART ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

The program or procedure of presenting the art activities follows a system developed out of recent research with preschool children working in other areas of art. Rather than giving the children just one theme or activity that is completed in twenty minutes, this "developmental" procedure aims at a "series" or "unit" of art activities. This allows the children to slowly come into contact with the materials, with examples of art, with techniques and with artists. There is time allowed to discover, to experiment, to come to know the traditional arts. The children can discuss and work together to find their own

solution to technical problems, as well as new, creative uses for the materials (Materjovsky-Nikoltsou, 1992,36, Nikoltsos, 1998, 161-166),

There are no patterns, no outlines made by adults, no pre-cut pieces ready for assemblage. The teacher works with the children, discussing, observing, suggesting, questioning, and being sensitive to the suggestions of the children. This model or method of "teaching", or better to say "approaching", the traditional arts with preschool children becomes creative action where problem-solving and creative expression and construction are developed from the child rather than the adult (Spodek, 1992, Gardner, 1998, 71).

There are five elements of the development arts program:

1. Discussion and observation of traditional arts with photos and other visual aids to describe the art form and the technique. Observation of the arts at an ethnological museum, crafts workshop and fabric-rug factory.
2. Collection and categorization of the materials: natural and synthetic fibers, straw, string, ropes, yarns, nylon, silk etc, and inquiry into the sources of these materials.
3. Manipulation of the materials: experimentation and discovery of the possibilities of different textures, thicknesses and construction qualities. Handling the materials and "getting-to-know" the properties of the materials.

4. Production and work with the materials to construct various types of designs and objects related to the traditional arts of fibers and weaving beginning with simple forms and proceeding to more complex forms. Working both individually and in group projects.
5. Evaluation by the children of the traditional arts of fibers and weavings. Reflection and recognition of their own work and the work of others, encouraging an appreciation and an aesthetic evaluation of the arts materials that were used.

ART ACTIVITIES WITH FOLK ART THEMES

The art activities that follow may be presented as a "unit on traditional arts", similar to the "project" program used in kindergartens (Katz, 1995) where the activities are within a short period of time, such as a week or a month. But it might be more beneficial to the children, and more interesting, to organize a "developmental program" which includes the simpler tasks of painting and drawing linear designs in the early Fall, more advanced designs and collage in the winter and weaving constructions in the Spring. Importance is placed on the children's visits to the Ethnological museum, crafts workshops and fabric or carpet industry. These visits can be throughout the

school year, and not only in the late Spring (Nikoltsos 1993,48, Margioridou and Takantza 1994)

1. Visits to the Ethnological Museum, crafts workshops, and fabric or carpet factories

The main reason for such visits is to allow the children to have first-hand experience and contact with the world of arts and crafts. Such experiences increase their observation and perception of the traditional arts, and add to their knowledge and understanding of the materials and techniques as well as the aesthetic values of these arts (Spodek, 1992).

Allowing the children to see the various types of traditional costumes the designs and colors on aprons, embroideries and carpets, increases their awareness of patterns, colors and forms of traditional motifs. If it is possible for the children to handle, touch and feel the artifacts, then they will have an even better knowledge of the materials and textures (Furth and Wachs, 1975).

Simple drawings with markers, crayons or colored pencils of the designs that they see could be done at the museum. This will reinforce their observational skills and the drawings can be displayed in the classroom for further discussion upon return to the school. If the museum has a workshop area, then it is even possible that the children could use fabric or yarns to make a

collage repeating the motifs that they had seen (Anzoulatiou-Retsila,1986, Oikonomidou-Bortsiou,1991, 104).

Visits to neighborhood workshops or industries also help the young children see the procedure of weaving, knitting or sewing of fabrics into clothing or carpets, etc. Whether hand operated looms, or knitting machines, the process of construction of fabrics will be tantalizing for the children, and often scrap materials can be collected and taken to the classroom for collage making, etc. (Frangos, 1993, 41-52).

2. A Folk-Art Corner in the classroom

In order to reinforce the experiences gained by the children during their visits to the museum or workshops, a corner exhibit of folk art items can be made by the children in the classroom. Parents and grandparents can contribute weavings, embroideries, ceramics and other items with traditional designs and motifs. Photographs and books can also be on display for the children to see (Nikoltsos,1993,48, Moraiti and Kaiapha,1994).

The children should have an opportunity to handle the items, to care for the exhibit, and even "play" carefully with the objects. Dramatic play and musical presentations can also compliment and supplement the art activities adding more opportunities for aesthetic experiences (Bruner, 1995, 641).

It should be stressed, however, that the folk-arts corner exhibit in the classroom should not be the only means of "observation and perception" of the traditional arts. The visits to the museums and workshops allow the children to leave the "artificial" world of the kindergarten and they learn to participate in the society that is outside the "four walls" of the classroom (Frangos,1993,52).

3. Painting and drawing traditional folk designs

This activity can fall under the category of "discussion" as well perception and observation. It is through drawing that the children can "talk" and "say" things about the art that they had seen in the museums or crafts workshops. While they may not be able to express their artistic and aesthetic appreciation in a "verbal", discussion, they do wonders with their "visual language" when asked to draw what they had seen (Manna and Nikoitsou, 1993, 31, Wolf, 1989, 22).

The materials can be markers, crayons, colored pencils, finger paints, tempera paints and brushes on white paper, colored paper, cardboard, and even fabric. A fabric piece of one color can be the best base for painting designs with fingerpaints or tempera colors.

The children are encouraged to make simple patterns of lines, as seen in designs of tablecloths, embroideries, etc: down,

across, around. Mathematical concepts come into these themes. Later, the more complicated designs of squares, triangles, circles, diamonds, etc. can be introduced. Then a series of these shapes can be drawn, emphasizing repetition and rhythm of forms and shapes. Eventually, the triangles and other shapes can be combined to create figures or flower designs for borders and trims as seen in embroideries.

These drawings can be small individual creations at first, simple and direct. More drawings can emphasis color and shapes. Later long sheets of paper or fabric can be decorated by group work.

4. Printing with string

This activity follows the simple drawings and paintings of line patterns. String or yarns are used with finger paints, tempera, or plastic paints. The children have a chance to handle the softness and thinness or thickness of the various yarns or strings (Lof,1997).

There are two methods that can be used for printing, or "painting" with string:

- a. The children hold a piece of string (30 εκ.) by its ends and they dunk it into a container that has some amount of plastic or tempera paint. Then they can stretch out the string and

place it on the paper. Picking it up and placing it down again and again, making a printed pattern of lines.

- b. Each child had a piece of string (30-40 εκ.). They use finger paints to color the string several different colors. The string is freely placed on one half of a piece of paper, and the paper is folded in half and pressed closed. Then the string is carefully pulled out. The paper is opened and there is a "mirror" design of multicolored forms.

5.String collage and constructions

All types of strings and yarns are collected. Each day the children can bring from home left-over yarns, or old knitted items that can be unraveled etc. Also strings and ropes can be collected. Straw, cornhusks, thin twigs, etc. can also would be used along with strings and ropes. Ribbons and cords from gifts are also good materials.

The children can sort these materials and put them in containers or boxes according to the thickness, thinness, color and texture. Collage designs are made using a white all purpose glue and can be made on paper or cardboard, but even better would be on pieces of cloth (20x30 εκ. or larger).

At first, the children should experiment with cutting and gluing the string or yarns, making simple designs. Later they can make faces or figures, or apron designs. These designs can be

small and individual work. Large cardboard or heavy fabric like felt can be used as a base for group collages where many children and different strings and yarns to make picture or design (Seyd, 1967) .

Besides gluing yarns to paper or fabric for collages, children can also decorate twigs and bare branches and create colorful mobiles and "tree" environments. The strings, ribbons, yarns, even small fabric scraps are tied, glued, twisted and wrapped around the twigs of a tree branch. This colorful construction can then be hung with a cord from the ceiling making a hanging, moving construction: *a mobile.*

6. Fabric collage and construction

In a large box or container, children can collect many types of scrap fabric and old unusable clothing and rags. With a visit to a clothing workshop, the owner might donate bags of scraps from cut pieces that are being assembled and sewn. Sorting and categorizing the types of fabric into large-medium-small pieces, into thin, thick, fuzzy, smooth, rough, even "warm" and "cool" can help develop the children's vocabulary, while the handling of such material will also develop their sense of touch (Getzels and Czikszenmihali, 1971,91),

A collage design can be made using long strips of old fabric along with addition of strings and yarns (Bell,1972). On

large cardboard or fabric, the strips can even begin to be "woven". This gives the children an opportunity to experiment and work at the "over-and-under" technique of weaving. Often in the kindergartens, we see this activity being done with strips of crepe paper or even paper ribbons. But strips of cloth, torn by the children or cut by the adult, becomes more appropriate materials for an introductory to weaving (Nikoltsos,1993,52),

Other collage activities may also be done with pieces of fabric, yarns, ribbons, buttons, and other such materials. Outlines made by the teacher should be avoided, if there is a need for an outline, the children should decide what it is they wish to make, and a child can attempt to draw the shape or form. The collages can have abstract patterns at first, also small pieces in triangular shapes, etc. can be glued in repeated patterns to make traditional designed "aprons" or kilms, woven mats etc.

Cutting the fabric with children's scissors is not easy unless the material is thin. But most fabric can be torn into little pieces and shapes. Again, as with the string collages, the best glue is the white, thick, all-purpose plastic glue.

Many fantastic constructions can be made with scrap fabric if the material is thin. But most fabric can be torn into little pieces and shapes. Again, as with the string collages, the best glue is the white, thick, all-purpose plastic glue.

7. Weaning

The above activities act as preparation and/or as an introduction to the actual weaving activity. The children have observed, discussed, handled, experimented and used traditional art motifs and materials. They have had some opportunity to get to know the materials that are used in weaving. Now they must be shown the technique and work at creating their own piece of cloth (Viggopoulos,1983, Lof,1987).

Even before using a loom, the children can weave yarns or fabric strips in and out of large plastic mesh, the type of plastic net used on balconies to protect babies. This gives them an opportunity to manipulate with their finger tips and use other fine kinetic actions developing dexterities needed for weaving.

The loom need not be a complicated wooden or plastic structure that can be found in the market. A loom can be a simple piece of heavy cardboard with string wrapped around on the top and bottom. A loom can be a cardboard box as well, this gives room under the yarn warp for the children to maneuver the other yarn under and over the warp. A wooden frame with sawed slits or with nails every centimeter or so can also be a sturdy loom. Even a strong "Y" shaped tree branch makes a beautiful "natural" loom.

Small weavings with strips of fabric are usually best for a beginning activity with young children. They can manipulate the

material easily and they reach a completed "result" before a group activity where on one loom several children will take turns weaving several rows of different colors, thus also completing a small place mat quickly

The weaving need not be completed during one art activity period, but rather, the loom can be in a crafts corner where the children who wish to sit and weave can do so on a day-to-day basis during their free periods.

The "mistakes" of the young children should also be respected and seen not as mistakes but as nice varieties of texture in the whole design of the weaving. They will not always be able to weave in and out in a uniform pattern, but that they can create a weaving from the raw materials of string, yarns and fabric strips is a major step to their appreciation, love and understanding of traditional arts and crafts.

Key words: Early Childhood Education, Art Education, Preschool Art, Folk Arts-Weaving, Foreign Country : Greece

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